

Clark County, Washington *Endangered Species Act Information*

Why should we save our salmon?

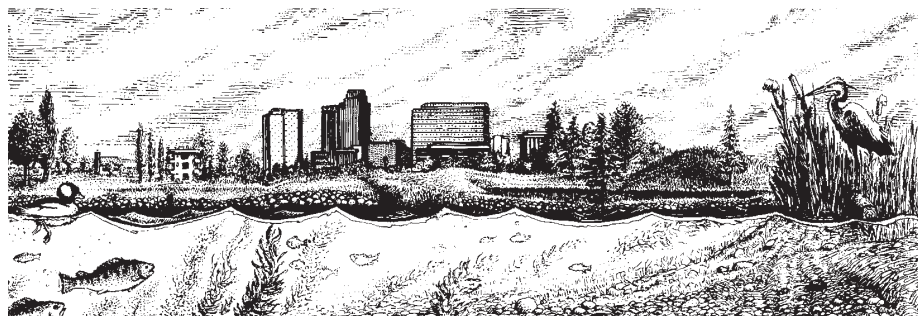
The Columbia River salmon have always been a vital part of our heritage here in Clark County. In fact, they are a defining symbol of the Pacific Northwest. But today the wild fish are nearly gone, victims of pollution, urban growth, dams, logging, over-fishing, and other human activities.

In the lower Columbia region, steelhead, chum, chinook, and bull trout have been listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA requires Clark County and other jurisdictions to ensure their actions don't jeopardize the continued survival of these fish. Failure to take appropriate actions could result in fines or lawsuits to the county and its citizens.

ESA requirements notwithstanding, why should we save these fish?

To answer this question, we might answer some other questions first. For example, what do we want Clark County to look like 50 years from now? What legacy do we want to leave our children and grandchildren? Why can't we just let the fish go extinct? Can we have a healthy economy without a healthy environment?

Maybe the fish could disappear and life in Clark County would be more or less the same. But salmon, like the canary in the coal mine, are good indicators of our own well-being. The clean water and healthy



environment that salmon need to survive are the same things we need for our own long-term survival. Saving salmon can also be an opportunity to improve the quality of life in our county.

If we don't care enough about saving salmon, what else are we willing to let go?

Even if all we needed to survive were cultivated plants and domestic animals, this would be a dull outcome to settle for. Although there is a cost to saving salmon and other wild species, there is also long-term economic and environmental value to safeguarding our ecosystems. Many businesses and individuals move to Clark County because of everything our environment offers. For some people, seeing wild salmon on their heroic return journey from the ocean – or simply knowing they exist – has a value that can't be measured in dollars.

As a society, we have a choice as to whether or not future generations will enjoy clean waterways teeming with salmon. The county is working with community groups, individuals, and other jurisdictions on salmon recovery efforts balanced within the framework of social and economic reality. Some priorities include addressing water quality issues, ensur-

ing adequate riparian buffers, and working with landowners and businesses on implementing best management practices.

Why are healthy runs of wild salmon declining?

As Clark County's human population has boomed, its fish population has plummeted. The relatively high numbers of returning salmon in recent years, while encouraging, should not be misinterpreted as a sign that everything is fine. Fish populations in our region have always fluctuated, but the overall trend continues downward. While natural phenomena such as flooding, predators, and ocean currents affect salmon populations, human activity poses by far the greatest threat to salmon survival. The effects of human activity on fish populations have been many decades in the making and will take many decades to remedy. The four main areas of human activity that threaten salmon are known as the four Hs:

- **HARVEST:** Commercial and sports fishing directly reduce fish populations.
- **HATCHERIES:** Artificial production facilities produce domesticated fish that threaten the ability of wild fish to survive when they interbreed

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with the wild fish.

■ **HYDROPOWER:** Dams block salmon migration up and down rivers and inundate fish habitat.

■ **HABITAT:** Streams, rivers, estuaries, marine waters, and surrounding flood plains are being steadily degraded by human activities that increase soil erosion, reduce the amount of woody debris in streams, raise the water temperature, add contaminants to the water, decrease water flow, and create barriers to fish passage. Diminishing habitat and loss of habitat complexity increases vulnerability to predators.

The first three are the focus of state and federal activities. The last Habitat falls under the jurisdiction of Clark County and is a local problem we can work on together.

For more information about salmon recovery in Clark County or for information on getting involved, contact the Clark County Endangered Species Program at 360)397-2022 or visit www.saveoursalmon.com.



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